

SOCIALIST STUDIES

No. 25

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**OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
THE SOCIALIST PARTY
OF GREAT BRITAIN**

Communications to: General Secretary,
71 Ashbourne Court, Woodside Park Road, London N12 8SB

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

OBJECT

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

ALL ENQUIRIES AND APPLICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP TO...

The Socialist Party of Great Britain,

71 Ashbourne Court, Woodside Park Road, London N12 8SB

PARTNERSHIP OR CLASS STRUGGLE ?

The New Statesman (4 July 1997) recently carried a report on the TUC's new relationship with the employers' associations. The article quoted John Monks, the General Secretary of the TUC as saying *"We aspire to be partners with employers"*. He went on to say *"The TUC conference in the autumn will debate a motion called '2Partners for Progress'. It's not Opponents for Progress, it's not Adversaries for Progress"*

And writing critically on the BA airline dispute John Monks wrote;

"... I am always keener to talk of partnership... just as the Cold War is over so is the class war... Companies and their workforce have more in common than which divides them." (Times 9.7.97.)

However Mr Monks never tells us what these common features are. Simply because there aren't any. The acrimonious dispute at British Airways, whose Chief Executive is a Labour supporter, is indicative of the class struggle; not because employers want to cause disruption and antagonism but because the competition imposed upon BA as a profit-making organisation compels it to restructure the company even if it means imposing lower pay and working conditions on its employees. You cannot ask a tiger to behave as a vegetarian when its instinct, its very life, depends upon it being a carnivore.

Ever since Frederic Bastiat published his **Economics Harmonies** in 1850, defenders of capitalism have harboured the desire for a harmonious partnership between workers and employers.

So the statement by John Monks is not new. More importantly, it will fail as did all previous schemes which tried to prevent class conflict. However, *"Partnership"*, is a curious proposition. On the one hand academics, journalists, politicians, and now it seems, the TUC leadership, all want to reject the very real existence of class conflict and class struggle between workers and capitalists, but at the same time they want to set up "partnerships" between the two conflicting classes to try to stop it occurring.

The trade unions, along with the politicians and economists plainly do not understand the cause of class struggle. Class conflict is the result of fact

that social classes exist with conflicting economic interests. Employers, who buy workers' labour power, need to buy it at as low a price as possible. But workers need to get as high a price for their mental and physical ability to work as they can. This is the basic bone of contention in capitalism. It can only be resolved when the working class, consciously and democratically, take political action to end production for profit and establish production for use. As the last oppressed class in human history workers have nothing to lose by abolishing capitalism. This is why Karl Marx said that the class struggle is "*the motor force of history*."

In whose interests ?

Political supporters of the TUC's new policy, like Tony Blair, are forever lecturing workers that the class struggle is the figment of the Marxist imagination. Yet the class struggle existed and had been documented by writers long before Marx and Engels came on the scene. And it is no good Governments claiming that they are above class conflict like umpires in a game of cricket. Labour Governments, in their imposition of wage restraint policies, their use of troops to break strikes, their spying on and imprisonment of trade unionists have shown exactly on whose side they are on when class conflict threatened the interests of British capitalism.

So socialists are quite confident that '*Partners for Progress*' will not progress very far and will collapse under the weight of its own contradictions. It will fail in precisely the same way as its predecessors, because employers will still try to cut wages and workers will have to struggle against employers to defend and better their current rates of pay and conditions of work. Those who believe Labour and Capital can settle their differences just do not understand the society in which they live. Class interests of employers and workers are not the same. The aim of the company is to ensure a profit for its shareholders. The function of trade unions is to further the interests of its members by ensuring their interests are pursued, and not those of the employing class.

The attraction, for employers, of a "*partnership*" with their workers is obvious. Employers would dearly love to have a pliant, obedient workforce dedicated to the aspirations of the company and those who own it. Unfortunately for employers and their political agents what will work against "*partnerships*" is the very experience of employment itself. Employment instils into most workers a negative attitude towards production and productivity. After all, paid work is often dull, unpleasant

and boring. Employment is not about doing fulfilling and creative work to meet individual or social needs. And neither is employment about interesting and satisfying work. Employment revolves around the requirement of employers to produce commodities for the market in order to make a profit.

There is also the persistent resistance by workers to capitalists continually trying to increase the pace and intensity of work.. Unlike either voluntary work or work associated with leisure, paid work is inefficient in that it creates an unwilling and dissatisfied workforce forced to obey the company's objective of profit-making. And let us not forget, as economists conveniently do, that capitalism is all about making profit and accumulating capital. It is not about meeting social needs.

The wages system also means exploitation and a class conflict arising from exploitation. The workers' capacity to work is the only commodity on the market which the employer can exploit to generate profit. Workers produce more social wealth than they receive in wages and salaries. Consequently the wages system constitutes an employing or capitalist class confronting a propertyless working class. Both classes are locked against each other in a day-to-day class struggle over the intensity and extent of exploitation; capitalists trying to get as much profit as they can out of the workforce and workers trying to extract the highest wage or salary possible from employers.

Class Struggle

Much of the TUC's thinking about partnership has come from the Involvement and Participation Association. this has the support of many large companies, including Welsh Water, Cellnet, John Lewis and Boots. The IPA's Executive Committee has representatives from unions like the TGWU and the GMB. The *"Partnership"* package dovetails into the EC's **Social Chapter** to which the New Labour Government is considering becoming a signatory.

In the IPA's glossy document - **"Towards Industrial Partnership: A New Approach to Relationships at Work"** - the IPA draws up three main common aims and objectives they believe workers and employers should strive together to achieve:

1. *A joint commitment to the success of the enterprise, in the interests of customers, suppliers, employees, shareholders and the community.*
2. *A recognition that there must be an effort to build trust ... by ... open and frank discussion of major policy issues, ..., through joint activities which do not threaten the other partner and in agreement to avoid public statements denigrating one another.*
3. *A joint declaration recognising the legitimacy of the role of each Party ... it must include management's right to take action in the interests of the organisation and employees' rights to see their interests represented.*

The IPA social reforms are indicative of the political ideas and beliefs seeping out of Management and Business Schools whose adherents believe in the sporting metaphor of team play, team spirit and team building, "buzz-words" which, they believe, can be imposed upon the day-to-day class conflict of industrial relations. The prose style is also typical of the sugary rhetoric employed by public relation consultants - those paid to distort the truth on behalf of their clients. Nevertheless, the document's content will be a non-starter. Its reasoning is erroneous, unworkable in practice and loaded against the interests of the working class.

To begin with, the IPA do not ask themselves why, under capitalism, workers need the protection of trade unions. Workers do not pay their weekly subscriptions to the union in the belief that they are paying into a charity. Experience at work has taught workers the necessity of combining together to protect themselves from employers. So, why should one "partner" still need protection from an organisation formed and sustained by the class struggle? Simply, it is to protect workers from the day to day conflict they experience with employers who are continually trying to increase profitability.

For most workers being in a job is an unpleasant experience of stress, pressure and having to cope with an oppressive hierarchy, often based on fear, verbal bullying and ruthless competition. A union does afford some degree of protection against this assault and the ability to fight back when it can. Trade unions have a clear interest in gaining, where possible, higher wages and salaries, an interest which goes against the profit objective. Unions are defensive organisations in the class struggle but to recognise that they are defensive, a reaction against employers and the

way employers abuse and exploit workers, indicates the absurdity of *"partnership"*.

Therefore, it is not in the class interest of workers to have leaders of trade unions sitting in partnership with employers. In fact, it is not in the interest of workers to have leaders at all. The union should be under the democratic control of the membership as a whole. Leaders agreeing to pacts with employers give the union less flexibility and have the tendency to submerge the union's interests with the interests and the objectives of employers. There is always a conflict between the demands for higher wages and the demand for higher profits. These facts will always work against the utopianism of *"partnership"* and a harmony of interests.

Workers also have no interest in the success of a company which they neither own nor control. The company, instead, owns the workforce's ability to work and appropriates what they produce. It is a social relationship workers are forced into because the alternative, unemployment, means hardship and discomfort. Even if workers received a few shares or had representatives on Boards of Directors they would still remain insecure, vulnerable and exploited. What is the point of unions being on the Board of Directors if they have no effective power? What is the point of a few shares if you are still open to wage cuts and redundancy? In trade depressions workers will not be profitable to employ. Under no circumstances should a union put itself in a position of sitting with employers deciding who is to go and who is to stay. It is the abrogation of trade union responsibility. Directors are appointed to further the interests of shareholders not workers.

Socialism: An Association of Equals.

Yet, it is the third aim of the IPA, which lets the cat out of the bag. The cat claws its way through the thin veneer of *"partnership"* to reveal the real underlying class interests and power relationships. According to the IPA, management must always enjoy the right to take action in the interests of the organisation and the shareholders who own it. It is because employers know that their interests and the interests of the workforce are going to be in conflict that management must retain overriding control. In the class struggle the push for higher wages and better working conditions acts against the company's interest, against the interest of profitability.

Every aspect of capitalist production and exchange works against partnership. What workers produce is dictated to them by the profit motive of the company which then owns as private property what the workers produce. Capitalism is all about unequal class relationships: the class power of employers and the relative powerlessness of the employed.

A true association of equals can only exist in a classless society, when the means of production and distribution are brought under common ownership and democratic control by all of society. In short, when capitalism is replaced by Socialism through the political action of a socialist majority.

Class Consciousness

One of the terms most frequently in use in socialist propaganda, and one which may prove most mystifying to the uninitiated, is the term "*class-consciousness*".

What do we mean when we speak of "*class consciousness*"? We mean simply a thorough knowledge of the position in society of the class to which the class-conscious subject belongs.

Socialists claim that class-consciousness is a mental condition which must necessarily precede working-class emancipation. The reason is because, owing to the peculiar complex social nature of the modern system, the interest of the classes is obscured, and only a clear understanding of the working-class place in the social system can enable the workers to see in what direction their class interests lie and therefore what they have to fight for ...

Class-consciousness, the knowledge of his slave-status, makes clear the opposition of class interests, and fits the worker for the class struggle.

The Socialist Standard May 1919

A SOCIALIST MESSAGE FOR TRADE UNIONISTS

The Socialist Party of Great Britain, from our inception in 1904 has had many members who have held office and played an active role in Trade Unions. We recognise the importance of Trade Unions in the class struggle against employers. Trade Unions can successfully bargain wage and salary increases when trade conditions allow and endeavour to restrict or even halt wage reductions when trade conditions deteriorate. Unions can also improve the working conditions for their members. They are an essential feature of the capitalist system. In the SPGB's study of Capitalism we have made a number of important contributions to the role of Trade Unions in the class struggle. We assert that the Unions can only act as a defensive weapon to the exploitation of our class in the productive process.

The Conduct of Strikes, Democracy and Trade Unions

In the use of the strike weapon, workers must recognise that except on rare occasions, any Government will enforce the law, and in the final analysis if a strike threatens the *"National Interest"*, that is the capital interest, the armed forces will be used to protect the status quo. When employers consider the issue of sufficient importance to warrant all-out resistance, the Union cannot hope to win - the disastrous strike by the miners in 1984 is a classic example. In all cases, strike action must be based on a majority decision of the membership and the decision to return to work should likewise be a majority decision. We only support union action when it is in the interest of the working class as a whole. We do not support Union action against another Union.

Worker Directors

The danger of *"worker directors"* to the unions is obvious. In times of *"laying-off"* or compulsory redundancies, Union representatives involved at Board meetings have to take decisions that can only lead to division within the union. *"Worker Directors"* is a contradiction in terms. Directors operate on behalf of the shareholders not the workers.

Trade unions and capitalist political parties

It is not in the workers' interest that their unions should affiliate to or support the Labour Party, or any political party which is committed to

administering the capitalist system. They must learn that no matter which party is in power, its weight will be thrown in support of the employers in any struggle, as all past governments have demonstrated.

Trade unions and the Minimum Wage

The SPGB has pointed out that the minimum wage legislation cannot be enforced and that many workers would rather put up with low wages than lose their jobs. We counterpose calls for low or high wages with a call for the abolition of the system of private ownership by a minority class of parasites which gives rise to the wages system.

Trade Unions and Social Security

UNIONS have supported Family Allowances in the misguided belief that the principle cause of poverty for many workers is the possession of young families. Socialists who found themselves in a trade union which supported this social reform, rigorously fought against its formal adoption as union policy. We argue that no scheme for social reform can remove the poverty endured by the working class under capitalism. Family Allowances were considered by the bosses to be a contribution to workers wages, and were taken into account when engaged in settling wage claims, on the basis that the children of workers had been partially provided for by these allowances. It is a reform currently under review by the Labour government as they struggle to cut the cost of social welfare in the interest of capitalism.

Trade Unions and New Labour

Workers erroneously believe New Labour, despite the failure of all past Labour governments, can run society in their interests. Great hope has been placed in Tony Blair and New Labour ending unemployment, poverty, and insecurity etc. and in dealing with the question of education and the health service. It is a false hope. Politically, Labour can only run capitalism in the interests of the capitalist class who own and control the means of wealth production and distribution. In Mr Blair's own words, speaking in the USA, ... he wanted to make labour a *"natural party of business ... just as much the party of business as the Conservatives, if not more"*. (Daily Telegraph 24 June 1997)

Trade Unions and the SPGB

The Socialist Party of Great Britain enters the political field not to run capitalism, but to work for its abolition and its replacement with the

common ownership and democratic control of the means to life by all of society. Our socialist message to all workers, regardless of race, sex or age is laid down in our **Object and Declaration of Principles**, and reproduced in this pamphlet. It is a call to all workers to stop giving support to capitalist politicians like Blair and Hague. We assert, Trade Unions can only be defensive organisation. The answer for the working class is political, not industrial: it is the establishment of Socialism. Why not consider joining our Party and help create a society where production for need replaces production for profit and where we are freed from the servility of employment, class and the wages system.

Instead of the conservative motto: A fair day's pay for a fair day's work (workers) ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword: 'Abolition of the wages system' (Karl Marx).

The above text was issued as a leaflet, and several hundreds distributed at the recent Trades Union Congress Conference at Brighton. With an attractive literature stall, sales of our pamphlets amounted to £56.

THE BUDGET: WHO CARED ?

Every year, in the months before the Chancellor of the Exchequer makes the Budget speech, the media engage in the popular game of guessing what changes in taxation will be made and giving advice about what the changes ought to be. The professional politicians concentrate on the second aspect: each one, according to party, telling us how, if the government adopts the right financial and taxation policy, the whole nation will benefit, the "right" policy being the one at present advocated by the Tories, the Labour Party, or the Liberal Democrats. The detailed remedies are sharply divided. Increase income tax and the corporation tax on company profits, or reduce them? Increase government expenditure or cut it down? Get government revenue mainly from income tax or from VAT? Spend more on defence or on education and the health service? Go for more inflation and rising prices or less? The variety is endless.

There are few things the three main parties have in common, as shown by their programmes at this year's general election. They all promise to reduce unemployment, to do something to help the poor and to get rid of class divisions in society. The Tories have their "classless society" and the Labour party their "one nation" doctrine on "partnership". Over the size of government expenditure they divide into two camps: the Tories want to cut it down, while the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats want it increased, these two conflicting policies being their main remedy for unemployment. Labour, for example, has proposed a "windfall" tax on the recently privatised companies to expand the Welfare to Work programme designed, it is claimed, to take 250,000 people who have been unemployed for two years or longer off the dole queue.
(Times July 3rd 1997)

All the arguments offered by the three capitalist parties to reduce unemployment are nonsense. Transferring "spending power" from the government to the public or from the public to the government does not increase the total and does not generate anything. In the years of rising unemployment from 1979 government expenditure not only went up sharply every year but also represented a higher proportion of total national income. Another test is to look at what happened when government expenditure was consistently lower than it is today. Measured against total national income, pre-1914 governments spent less than a fifth of the amount now being spent. But that low expenditure no

more prevented the Great Depression, with its heavy unemployment, which lasted for twenty years from 1875 to 1895, than did high expenditure prevent the two recent depressions which began in 1979 and 1990 respectively.

We don't now hear of inflation itself being advocated as a cure for unemployment but that was Labour Party policy in the 1930s and as late as 1982, Clive Jenkins, a member of the TUC General Council, was advocating inflation *"to create millions of jobs"* (Financial Times 27 October 1982). Inflation should not, he said, exceed a rate of 14 to 15 per cent a year. Events gave him the answer: between 1978 and 1981 the inflation rate averaged 14.25 per cent a year and unemployment went up from 1,383,000 to 2,520,000. The following year it went up to over three million.

Most workers are convinced that they have a vital interest in the Budget because it can raise or lower income tax (PAYE), and affect the price level. They believe that they would be better off if PAYE was reduced and if prices did not rise. Of course they are at the moment the changes take place, but in the long run the worker's standard of living does not depend on whether PAYE or prices are high or low; it depends on whether capitalism is expanding or in depression and on the effectiveness of trade union organisation as a result of the class struggle. The question of wages and taxes was dealt with by Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations* (1776). If, in given market conditions an employer can get the workers needed only by paying them £300 per week, any tax on wages has to be paid by the employer because it is still necessary to offer take-home pay of £300 a week. In the 19th century governments accepted that conclusion and income tax was not levied on wages. It was also accepted by David Ricardo and by Marx.

After the introduction of PAYE the amount deducted from wages has been consistently high, for most workers 25 per cent or more but the average purchasing power of workers' take-home pay is higher now than it was before PAYE and, with some short-term set-backs, has continued to rise in spite of a massive increase in prices. It has continued to rise since production began to expand again in 1981 and 1996 and is about 15-16 per cent higher in real terms than it was in 1979. In spite of heavy unemployment employers have only been able to get the kind of skills they need by paying more for them. British Telecommunications recently agreed to higher salary rises for its information technology workers.

Similarly, competition for suitable university graduates persuaded British Aerospace to offer higher salaries for its engineering graduates. The Bank of England "agents" who provide information to the bank on business conditions around the country recently said skill shortages were *"severe in specialised areas of engineering, information technology, accountancy, law and marketing and significantly in electronics and chemicals"*. (Independent on Sunday, May 1997).

The generally accepted view is that a direct tax like income tax cannot be passed on, but some economists take the view that corporation tax on company profits costs the companies nothing because they can get it back by charging higher prices. William Keegan, economics editor of the Observer, wrote of Nigel Lawson, Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Thatcher administration, as one who *"belongs to the school of thought that, in the end, it is the consumer who foots the corporate tax bill"*. This is a curious belief. If true, why do companies and the Confederation of British Industry keep urging the Chancellor to reduce the tax? Now that the Chancellor has reduced the rate of corporation tax will there be a corresponding reduction in prices? Of course not. Broadly speaking companies sell their products at what the market will bear. They cannot, at will, ignore market conditions and charge more than the market will bear if corporation tax goes up or down.

What the Budget presented by Gordon Brown contained is the outcome of conflict between different sections of the capitalist class, each trying to unload on to other sections the inescapable costs of government. Hence the representations made to the Chancellor before the Budget giving the reasons why he should reduce, or at any rate not increase, the amount levied on the group making the representations. In the Times the day after the Budget, bosses were canvassed on how well or poorly they did out of the Budget. Allan Leighton, chief executive of Asda, was pleased with Gordon Brown because *"he recognised the needs of retailers"*. Tim Melville-Ross of the Institute of Directors welcomed *"the reduction in corporation tax rates"*. Brian Stewart, though, chief executive of S & N was disappointed in the increase in duty rates on alcohol. The tobacco trade, in spite of their argument that they were being *"ruined"* by either high duties or consumers going to Spain or France for cheaper cigarettes, had to put up with another increase.

Coming back to wages it is instructive to see what happened in the latter part of the 19th century. Having been weak and quite ineffective the

trade unions grew rapidly in membership and organisation. The study made by Professor Bowley and G.H. Wood of wages and prices showed that between 1870 and 1900 average real earnings of the workers, after discounting price changes rose by over 70 per cent (the table was reproduced in *An Introduction to the Study of Prices* by Walter Layton). The organised workers had been able to get a share in increased productivity and also cut into profits. Frederick Engels, who had watched this going on, noted in 1892 *"the remarkable improvement of the conditions of the workers in the great trade unions"*.

Where do the three parties, Tory, Labour and Liberal, stand on the struggle of the unions to get higher wages? They all profess to approve of trade union organisation but, as governments, their chief concern is to maintain profits by preventing what they call *"excessive"* wage increases. Every government since 1945 has introduced some kind of *"income policy"* to keep wages down. Under the Labour Government 1945-51, the Chancellor, Stafford Cripps, laid down the principle that wages must not be increased just because prices had gone up; the only justification for higher wages had to be increased productivity. Thirty years later, in the Winter of Discontent of 1978-9, the Callaghan Labour government tried to restrict wage increase to five percent while prices were rising by 10 percent. New Labour under Mr Blair will be no different.

What of the rich and powerful? *The Times* put the Budget and the Capitalist Class in some perspective in its *Budget Supplement*. In a piece entitled *"No sleepless nights expected for inhabitants of millionaires row"*, it was pointed out that those living in Belgravia would not be worrying about the reduction in the tax relief on mortgages because they were so wealthy that they were unlikely to need mortgages. The Budget might mean the capitalist class losing profit - social wealth exploited from workers - to the Exchequer but it is the employers' budget and their state. As for the working class the budget is an irrelevance. Poverty, unemployment and class subservience will still exist. In another article, *The Times* commented on the Education and Employment Secretary stating that people on the dole will lose 60 per cent of their benefit if they do not take a job or training place under the Welfare to Work scheme. Those workers who will become victims of Labour's vindictive assault on the unemployed (nothing is said about the *"work-shy"* capitalist class who have never done a day's work in their life) might well set up home with empty cardboard boxes obtained from Asda and beg for money along Belgravia's Millionaires Row. Under capitalism the

rich and the poor are free, at least, to use the same pavement.

The working class should disregard how the capitalists choose to frame their Budgets. Workers should let the capitalists and their politicians deal with their own interests and squabbles. Workers should look to their own organisations, remembering however that there is a limit to what the unions can do. As Marx pointed out, wages cannot be sustained at a level so high that an employer cannot make a profit. He also called on the working class to solve their problems once and for all by establishing socialism.

Work under capitalism

... within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour-process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as one independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour-process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform life-time into working time. Marx: **Capital Volume 1**, Moscow Edition, p.604

How the Rich live

On the menu at Les saveurs, the restaurant of the seriously rich, owned by RF Hotels, Sir Rocco Forte's new investment, there is a bottle of 1989 red burgundy, Domaine de la Romanee Conti priced at £45,000. When parasites feast they feast well.

PARLIAMENT AND POLITICAL ACTION

In their new pamphlet **The Market System Must Go!** the Clapham based so-called socialist party claim that some of the material was "*adapted from previous editions of . . . the now out-of-print Questions of the Day*" published by the Socialist Party of Great Britain before it was reconstituted in 1991. It is perhaps not surprising that this adaptation resulted in the omission of the chapter on **Parliament** (*Question of the Day*, 1978). This chapter, which outlines the SPGB's arguments against Direct Action, is incompatible with the Clapham party's policy of the "*immediate abolition of the state*" and their courting of anarcho-communism, council communism and other direct-action political organisations through joint forums and publication.

We publish below an edited version of this chapter: for reasons of space we have shortened it. However the SPGB's unique argument that Parliament is the best political means a socialist working class can use to bring about the end of capitalism and the exploitative class system is clearly argued. We will be pleased to send a full copy of the text to any reader interested in reading the whole piece.

Parliament

The Socialist Party of Great Britain has always insisted on the necessity for the workers to gain control of the machinery of government before trying to set up Socialism.

The State is the public power of coercion. It arose out of the early division of society into classes, and developed with the development of class conflicts. It is the result of the desire to "keep order": order, that is, in the class that is supreme; order to allow the ruling class to protect its property ownership and exploit the rest of the population ...

— In the development of the State the modern parliamentary system emerged as the most appropriate means for securing the domination of the capitalist class, the last class to obtain social control. Parliaments were subjected to modification in the course of time and the modern product ensures to the capitalist class their ownership of the means of production and the right legally to exploit the working class.

... Members of Parliament are elected by adult suffrage, and the vast majority of the voters are members of the working class. The result is near enough democratic to ensure that when the mass of the working class understand and want Socialism they have the means to bring it into being through parliamentary action.

Up to the present, the mass of the workers have lacked this political knowledge and have voted for people instead of principles. They have given their votes to those politicians who made the most alluring promises. As time proved the hollowness of those promises, the workers turned in disgust from one group of political leaders to another, and then back again, as the memory of the previous disappointments faded.

This fact has led some to question the usefulness of Parliament and to advocate industrial action. But those who have done this have forgotten that the workers have been as readily betrayed on the industrial field as they have on the political. They have forgotten that whenever the workers have placed their trust in leaders they have almost always been let down. This has not been due to the field of combat, but to the method adopted. When the workers cease to regard certain individuals as endowed with some special capacity for leadership, they will adopt the method of issuing to delegates instructions that are to be carried out regardless of the delegates' own views or wishes. The ground will then be cut from under the feet of those who prosper out of leadership, and such people will no longer have a saleable article for the capitalist in the shape of a blind following.

Socialism will not be possible until the mass of the workers understand it and are prepared to vote for it. When the workers understand Socialism they will know what to expect and what will be involved in putting it into operation.

Two ... theories, both of them dangerous and impractical have been put forward by those who deny the usefulness of parliamentary action to achieve socialism. One is that workers can gain control of the State machine without the vote by means of an armed uprising. The other is that workers can set up their own machinery of government in opposition to the capitalist State. The two theories converge because in practice the capitalist class, controlling the armed forces through their parliamentary majority, will see to it that no hostile armed force comes into being to challenge their supremacy.

... When the majority of workers have become socialist there is no need for an armed uprising. They withdraw their support from capitalist parties and support the socialist party so that Parliament, which controls the armed forces, will be composed of socialist delegates. If some capitalists did try to organise resistance they would reveal themselves as a small minority, lacking popular support, trying to create chaos in the furtherance of their sectional interest against the declared will of society: they would be bound to fail.

Minority action is suicidal folly and could not lead to Socialism even if successful. For unless the immense majority of workers want socialism there is no possibility of it being established. Even if an insurrectionist minority managed to get control of political power, it could not alter the basic problems and processes of capitalism. It would have to contend with the anti-socialist prejudices of the majority and it might be overthrown in another insurrection ...

... armed uprisings, led by a "vanguard party", are a method of a would-be capitalist ruling class and cannot be used by the workers. The workers' method can only be democratic political action based on a socialist understanding.

— In Britain, Parliament has a complete and secure grip upon the armed forces, and government interventions in the strikes and disturbances of past years have shown on whose side they act. These were a forceful illustration of how necessary it is for workers to obtain control of Parliament before attempting to uproot the existing foundations of society. They further show that the only way to obtain control is by sending socialist delegates to Parliament.

... The size and complexity of a modern nation is so great that the time has long since passed when members of the ruling class could themselves occupy any considerable number of the administrative posts and manage any appreciable part of their activities. From top to bottom all departments are filled by paid or elected officials, and only a very few of these officials are drawn from the capitalist class itself. Practically all the work of controlling the activities of society today is performed by people who depend for their livelihood upon their pay-members of the working class. The armed forces, including most of the officers, are also recruited from the working class.

Thousands of functions have had to be delegated to subsidiary bodies like local councils, statutory boards and tribunals. Year by year this delegation of function grows.

Circumstances, therefore, have compelled the capitalists to place administration in the hands of elected or appointed bodies. If they were to attempt to end this in the face of a determined socialist majority, they would bring their house down about their ears.

The importance of Parliament is quite plainly recognised by the capitalists, and they give clear evidence of this at election times by the amount of wealth they spend and the inconvenience they suffer in order to ensure their control of it.

The attitude of the Socialist Party of Great Britain on the need to gain control of the political machinery has been logical and consistent. We hold the same view as Marx as to the necessity of the workers gaining control of the machinery of government before they can establish Socialism. We also hold Marx's view that in the industrially advanced capitalist countries the vote will give that control. The one way to prevent the capitalist from using political power against the workers is to refrain from voting them and their agents into political power. Accordingly we have always urged workers not to vote for any candidate who is a supporter of capitalism.

Questions of the Day - a Socialist analysis, March 1978 p. 9-14

CLAPHAM'S CENSORSHIP

Since we re-constituted the Socialist Party of Great Britain in June 1991 we have sent a copy of our journal **Socialist Studies** to all branches, Groups and Contacts of the so-called "Socialist Party" in Clapham. One copy was also sent at their request for their library.

We took this action because the Executive Committee of that organisation has a policy of ignoring us and refuses to answer any of the allegations we have made about their anti-socialist activities. We believed that by sending a copy of our journal to their membership in this way they would at least be aware of the stand we take.

We sent issue No. 24 in separate envelopes to Islington, Camden and Clapham Branches care of their head office at Clapham because this is the address given for these Branches in their journal **Socialist Standard**. One other copy was sent to the Socialist Party for their library.

These have all been returned to us in a large envelope, without a stamp, entailing 75p unpaid postage. One envelope had been opened, that of Camden Branch. The envelope, in bold computer style type, was addressed as follows:-

The Leader,
OAP Vanguard Group
71 Ashbourne Court
Woodside Park Road
London N12 8SB

This raises a number of interesting points. Do Branches of the Clapham organisation know that some of their correspondence addressed to them is never forwarded or made available for one of their members to collect? This is a form of censorship that is to be deplored, particularly coming from a Party that prides itself on meeting all political challenges to their case.

As to the name on the returned envelope, the person or persons responsible for this might be dismissed as being infantile, but it also reflects an attitude to ageism no less anti-socialist and anti-working class as either sexism or racism. Is an "*OAP group*" to be singled out because of their age (which is incorrect)? Is being an "*OAP*" a matter for derision and would the elderly not be allowed to become members of the Clapham

party? Or is it a cheap jibe to cover up the failure of the Clapham party to advance their literature sales at various Conferences, compared with our own success. It will also be interesting to see the reaction of a number of their members who subscribe to our journal; will they think it fit to write in to their EC condemning this action, or better still, resign from what is clearly not a socialist political organisation.

Marx on Censorship

In his pamphlet **Marx and Soviet Reality** (1955), Daniel Norman wrote:

Marx would not accept any form of censorship in any circumstances, for it is "a precautionary measure taken by the police against freedom ... and a bad police measure at that."

He also quotes Marx's view that:

the characteristic of the censored press is that it is a flabby caricature without liberty, a civilised monster, a horror even though sprinkled with rose-water. (MEGA I/I/I)

FURTHER LITERATURE AVAILABLE

Socialist Studies - our official journal

Issues Nos: 1 - 24 • 50p each

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ORDERS TO OUR HEAD OFFICE.

71 Ashbourne Court, Woodside Park Road, London N12 8SB
(Please make cheques payable to SOCIALIST STUDIES).

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

NORTH WEST LONDON BRANCH

meets at 7.30 pm on the 1st and 3rd Mondays in month at
Abbey Community Centre, Belsize Road, London NW6.

Secretary C. May, 71 Ashbourne Court, Woodside Park Road,
London N12 8SB

CAMDEN / BLOOMSBURY BRANCH

meets at 6 pm on the 4th Tuesday of month at
Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, WC1

Correspondence to the Secretary, S.P.G.B., 31 Caernarvon Road,
Eynsbury, St. Neots, Cambs. PE19 2RN (Tel: 01480 403345)

All meetings are open to the public and visitors are welcome.
Those wishing to find out more about the Party and its activities
should contact the Secretary.

1997-1998 LECTURE SERIES

We have arranged four lectures up to the end of this year, with a general
mix of subjects. Eighty years on from the Russian Revolution of 1917
gives us the opportunity of seeing how correct was our analysis of these
events so many years ago. Other subjects touch upon fundamentals of
the Socialist case.

Sunday 26 October

CAPITALISM & THE SQUARE MILE.

Speaker: C. May.

Sunday 9 November

WAR & PEACE.

Speaker: R. Lloyd.

Sunday 23 November

RUSSIA. 1917-1997.

Speaker: C. Skelton.

Sunday 14 December

REVOLUTION - THE STATE and the S.P.G.B. Speaker: K. Knight.

Venue:

Marchmont Community Centre,
62 Marchmont Street, London WC1.
(5 minutes Russell Square & Euston Tube Stations.)
3 p.m. start

Questions.

Discussion.

25

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

HEAD OFFICE

71 ASHBOURNE COURT
WOODSIDE PARK ROAD
LONDON N12 8SB

Tel: 01480 403345

OBJECT

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by, and in the interests of, the whole community.

Please Reply to:
Head Office

October 1997.

A little later than anticipated, but I'm pleased to enclose Socialist Studies No. 25 - our third issue of 1997. The last issue of the year - due out in December, will be mailed with our next pamphlet, dealing with various aspects of the economics of Capitalism; a Marxist analysis of what makes the system tick.

The Budget, hailed by the Labour Party as a stroke of genius, was yet another attempt to appeal to all sections of the capitalist class; not an issue for the working class to get involved in.

Copies of our leaflet for Trade Unionists are available on request. We had an enjoyable couple of days at the T.U.C. Conference in Brighton, and as stated, good sales of our various pamphlets. We also spent a day at the Liberal-Democrats Conference in Eastbourne, where sales were just under £20. The next issue of Socialist Studies will also print the leaflet we distributed at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton at the end of September. 2,000 copies of the leaflet were given to delegates, and sales of pamphlets amounted to £44. This figure would have been much higher, but we cleared out stocks of the pamphlet - Women and Socialism. A reprint, the third is now in hand.

We make no apologies for a couple of references to the so-called Socialist Party of Clapham; nothing they do these days really surprises us.

Finally, details of our new lecture series. Speakers put a lot of work in the preparation of their material, and your support would be welcome.

Yours for Socialism,

C. May. General Secretary.

Cecil May.